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# 135 Boomers and healthcare workers may not add up

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BLUFFTON — Southern Beaufort County in-home care companies say they have enough workers now, but worry that a growing elderly population might make it tough to find enough people to fill that need in the future.

Caregivers here, like those across the country, face low wages, emotionally difficult work and few benefits, when compared with many other service jobs.

Rachel Carson, owner of the local franchise of Home Instead Senior Care, said she tells applicants that if they're seeking a full-time job to pay the rent, they might be considering the wrong line of work.

Most of her company's 190 caregivers are re-

tired from other professions and looking for a part-time job that allows them to give back to the community, Carson said.

She has no trouble now finding people to do the work, which can include everything from meal preparation to help bathing, Carson said.

But the percentage of people who need the most help — those facing Alzheimer's disease or other crippling illnesses — is likely to rise as the elderly population grows, Carson said.

Bob Norwood, owner of the local Comfort Keepers franchise, which provides in-home non-medical care, also sees challenges in finding staff in the future.

Norwood predicts that firms that can't keep enough good caregivers will fold. That will mean fewer caregivers and could lead to higher wages, or it could drive people to nursing homes sooner.

Currently, his 30 to 50 caregivers make between \$8 and \$12 per hour, and Comfort Keepers charges clients \$15 to \$20 an hour for care, Norwood said.

"It's tough to find good people, especially good people who are trained," he said.

Southern Beaufort County has long been a popular retirement destination and probably will continue to be so. The need for caregivers here will soon grow quickly, as retiring boomers arrive, many bringing their elderly parents with them, Norwood said.

Even with low pay and few benefits, people like Mary Wright of Hardeeville want to do the job.

Wright spends four days a week as a home caregiver for elderly people on Hilton Head Island for Home Instead Senior Care. She says her part-time job is like missionary work.